



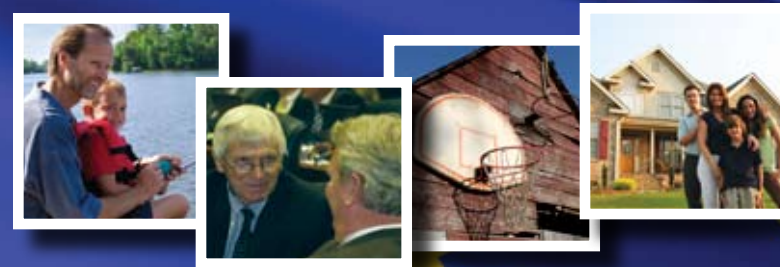
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Jeff Espich

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2009 Legislative Update

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2009 Legislative Update



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What important issues are facing our community today in your opinion?

Please feel free to e-mail your thoughts to me at h82@iga.in.gov, post your comments on my Web site at www.in.gov/h82, or return this card with your comments below.

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Taxpayers are Winners in New State Budget

I believe the new state budget, based on solid, common-sense principles, is a success for Hoosier taxpayers and public education.

The budget is a bipartisan compromise, receiving support from Democrats and Republicans alike. Sound fiscal principles remained an important influence. It is a success, I believe, because:

- It contains no general tax increases.
- It maintains at least \$1 billion in state reserves.
- It uses one-time federal stimulus money responsibly, including statewide infrastructure and university construction projects.
- It does not deplete trust funds or other dedicated money for operating expenses.

Gov. Mitch Daniels, along with House and Senate Republicans, outlined those standards early in the process and did not waver. While many states are cutting overall education spending, raising taxes, or both, this budget does neither. It even promises more support for education through additional funding.

Other highlights of the budget include:

- Creates an ombudsman to provide oversight to the Department of Child Services.
- Allocates \$10 million to the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center, a business development center dedicated to growing businesses and fostering innovation in Northeast Indiana.
- The Ivy Tech Community College network was given enhanced support, and bonding is authorized to fund 38 university capital projects throughout the state, including Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne.
- The state's higher education scholarship grants program receives increases of 6 percent in fiscal year 2010 and 3 percent in fiscal year 2011.

I believe this is the right budget for Indiana right now, and that's why I voted for it.



Rep. Espich and Rep. Ruppel preparing for session.



Rep. Espich meets with Rep. Duncan.

School Funding

Funding for K-12 education now accounts for more than half of Indiana's \$28 billion biennial budget. Thus, it is no surprise that school funding was front and center in the debate over the state's budget. House Republicans believed that K-12 education should be given top priority and money intended for education should follow the student all the way to the classroom. In the final version of the budget, education was one of only a few areas of state government to receive a funding increase, thanks in part to federal stimulus dollars.

The recently passed budget increased spending on K-12 education by about 1.1 percent in 2010 and an additional 0.3 percent in 2011 without raising taxes.

The state budget also included an education "trigger." The trigger is activated when actual state tax revenues exceed the state's estimates. What this means for K-12 education is that one-half of any extra revenue received by the state will be sent to local schools. For example, if actual state revenues exceed the state's estimates by just 1 percent in the fiscal year, then over \$65 million will be sent to local schools across the state. This is equivalent to an additional 1 percent increase in school funding.

This increased investment in education was done at a time when year-over-year state revenues have declined by 7.4 percent and more than 30 other states are cutting education, raising taxes, or both.

As a lawmaker, I wish that the General Assembly could have done even more for education, but I believe that the result was extraordinary given the current economic climate. Quite frankly, Indiana is very fortunate to be able to increase investment in K-12 education at a time when most other states are unable to do so.

Qualified Immunity for Teachers

House Enrolled Act 1462 grants teachers qualified immunity for reasonable acts of discipline. This legislation removes a worry that prevented teachers from disciplining misbehaving students, allowing them to maintain a safer environment for learning. The legislation also:

- Adds possession of child pornography to the list of felonies for which teachers may lose their licenses.
- Requires a school corporation, a charter school, and accredited nonpublic schools to conduct an expanded criminal history background check before employing a potential employee in any position within the school corporation.

Tuition Exemption for Purple Heart recipients

This legislation honors these Hoosier heroes by granting all Hoosier Purple Heart recipients free tuition to state colleges and universities. Previous law provided tuition to those who received the Purple Heart after Sept. 10, 2001, and the children of all Purple Heart recipients.

Silver Alerts

This law creates a Silver Alert system to alert law enforcement and the public when an endangered adult is missing, similar to the Amber Alert system for children. When an endangered adult, such as an Alzheimer's patient, wanders from a residence, law-enforcement agencies have the authority to alert local media.



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